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POPULAR TALKS ON LAW

WILLS: BREAKABLE AND UNBREAKABLE

By Walter K. Towers, A. B., J. D., of the Michigan Bar

Samuel Hendrix had a son—a fact he almost regretted, for he seemed thoroughly bad and the father had expended much of his property in keeping the boy out of jail. Naturally enough, Samuel desired that on his death his wife and daughter should receive all the remaining property and the son none. So he wrote the following:

"When I die it is my will that all my property be equally divided between my wife, Esther, and my daughter, Sarah.

"(Signed) SAMUEL HENDRIX."

Samuel had heard that witnesses are necessary to a will, so he called in his wife, Esther, and daughter, Sarah, and had them watch him while he wrote his signature and then sign their names below his. The result was that neither the wife nor the daughter could take any property under the will, for it is a general rule of law that no one who witnesses a will may take any benefit or receive anything from that will. Had Samuel Hendrix possessed a bit more information of the law he would have called others as witnesses and his wishes could have been enforced.

This illustrates but one of the many pitfalls into which one may fall in the very important task of drafting his will. The preparation of a will is usually a task for an attorney, and a good one, but there are cases of emergency when a lawyer's services are not readily obtainable. If the estate is small and not scattered, and the disposition that is to be made of it is simple, direct and clearly understood it requires no great knowledge to draft an effective will. In any event some information of the laws governing the disposition of property on death is interesting as well as decidedly useful.

A will is ever a fascinating instrument. The preparation of it is a serious matter and into it the maker puts his deliberate and well-considered thought. Thus it goes far toward revealing the real spirit of the maker. The words of the will are the words a man desires to leave when he has passed beyond; they display his true attitude toward friends and relatives.

Death is the great inevitable. Tax dogers are famous, but death dodgers have [illegible] notoriety. The will is made in appreciation of the inevitable end and takes effect upon decease. It is thus that one may be assured that his wishes in regard to the disposition of his property will be regarded after death. The power to make a will has not always been recognized by law. The will is stated to be of Roman origin, but, be that as it may, the power to will is now firmly established by law.

To make a will requires mental capacity. We often hear of instruments drawn as wills which are set aside by the courts because the maker was lacking in intellect. The mental capacity that is required to make a will may be enumerated as follows: 1. Ability to understand the nature of a will and that the maker is engaged in making his will. 2. Ability to know and keep in mind the various items of his property. 3. Ability to know and keep in mind the members of the family and others entitled to the maker's bounty. In general, any person of full age possessing the mental capacity described above, and not subject to some special legal disability, may make a valid and binding will. In the majority of the states the full age of twenty-one years is required of both sexes before the power to make a will is granted.

Married women were formerly denied the right to will their property, but modern statutes quite generally give them that privilege. Of course, an insane person, lacking the required mental qualifications, cannot make a will, nor can infants under age, in most states.

The first great requisite of a will is that it shall be in writing. This does not mean that it shall be written in longhand, though that is the most desirable of all ways when the maker is preparing his own will. Typewritten wills and printed wills, with the blanks filled in, are common, and wills have been held valid when prepared in many unusual ways on strange substitutes for paper or parchment. The prudent attorney, in preparing a will, always sees to it that the entire instrument is fastened together. Thus if the will consists of several typewritten or printed sheets, the last of which alone is signed, another typewritten page might be substituted for an unsigned one and the whole character of the instrument altered. So, if the entire will cannot be written on a single sheet of paper, the various pages should be so attached that they cannot be separated without detection. The pages are usually stapled or pasted together at the top and a cord is run through them, tied and sealed. It is wise for the maker of the will, the testator as he is called, to initial each page in such cases.

Further, the will must be signed by the maker and witnessed in the manner required by the statutes of the state in which it is made. Nevada is the only state which requires a seal. The usual and proper method of signing is for the maker to write his name in full at the bottom of the will. Where the maker cannot write, his "mark" is sufficient. Wills have been held valid when signed with initials, or parts of the name, or by a stamp, but such methods are dangerous. If a person is for any reason incapable of writing he may authorize another to sign his name for him.

Not only must a will be signed, but it must also be witnessed, and that in the strictes form. Some states require but two witnesses; others three, but it is always best to have three witnesses. As was pointed out in the case of Samuel Hendrix, the witnesses must be persons who have no interest in the will, and it must be seen to that neither they nor their near relatives are to receive anything under the will.

The manner in which a careful attorney completes the necessary formalities, having written the will itself and secured the witnesses is somewhat as follows: All the persons—maker and witnesses—must be in the same room and all in sight of each other. The maker declares the will to be his and writes his signature, with all the witnesses watching him. Then each of the witnesses in turn signs his name, the entire party still remaining together. While a will is usually dated, this is not necessary. No registration is required. The original will is filed in a safe place, usually by the maker among his papers, and a copy put in another place. The copy is not a will, but is useful in proving the contents of the will if the instrument should be destroyed or altered.

Having made a will and wishing to change it, the maker has two general courses open. He may write another will, in which he expressly revokes the earlier one, or pen a revocation, either of which instruments must be signed and witnessed as a will. Or he may take the will and by tearing it up, burning it, or drawing lines through it, with the intention of revoking it, cause it to lose all effect as a will. In Iowa this act must be done in the presence of witnesses and in all cases it is best to do so.

On the death of the maker, those interested in the will usually secure the services of an attorney in having it probated and the estate administered. Of course, the person named in the will as executor may himself place it before the probate, or similar court, but he usually finds is simpler to have a lawyer arrange matters. If no executor has been named by the maker in his will, an administrator is appointed by the court. It is the duty of executor or administrator to care for the deceased's property and see that it is distributed according to the terms of the will under the direcion of the court. Of course, the will and proof of the maker's death must first be placed before the court and the validity of the will established.

In determining the meaning of a will, the court is always guided by the cardinal principle that the intention of the maker of the will is to be determined as accurately as possible from the instrument and effect given thereto.

The task of the person making a will is to realize its importance, weigh all the possibilities carefully and state them clearly. The task of the lawyer is to warn the maker of the various contingencies that may arise in the maker's peculiar circumstances to affect the disposition of his property and to see that all of the necessary formalities have been complied with. A will is not a thing to be made hastily, or without information. Consider thoroughly and then act carefully.

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Crystal Remodeled

With Seating Capacity of Over 300, this Picture and Playhouse Will Meet With Instant Approval of Alliance People.

Harry Dubuque, proprietor of the Empress and Crystal theatres, has remodeled the latter at a cost of about $1500, making it one of the most modern and attractive in this part of the west. The inerior has been entirely remodeled, the stage widened, the slant of the floor increased, new, comfortable seats, and the appearance of the interior entirely changed.

Alliance people should visit this picture house at their earliest opportunity, for it certainly presents the appearance of a metropolitan house. Those who have been at the Crystal before will have difficulty in recognizing the interior. Mr. Dubuque promises the best pictures and talent obtainable.

Gordon Will Come

Fire Department from Bustling Sister City Will Come to Tournament

The following letter was received the last of the week from Geo. F. Williams, of the Gordon Journal, and gives the welcome information that the Gordon fire department will join the state association and send a team to the tournament in Alliance.

5/3/1913.

Mr. Lloyd Thomas,
Alliance, Nebr.

Dear Bro. Ed:—Will you please send me the rules and regulations covering the entries in your firemen's tournament to be held there. Our meeting night is Monday the 12th. We may have some entries and join the State Association. Please let me know as soon as possible.

Yours truly,
GEO. F. WILLIAMS.

F. E. Holsten has returned from a week's business trip to Denver, Omaha and other important business centers.

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